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SEARCH AND DESTROY

by Brett Halliday

*There was a killer out there who was very good
at his job. It was up to Shayne to stop this
maniac — or die trying! 4*

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*Sometimes it happened that way — the strangest people
want to murder their wives!*

The Customer

by JACK RITCHIE

HE CAME TO MY TABLE IN THE CORNER OF THE CLUB'S BAR and stared at me. "Are you James Garrison?"

I nodded.

Yes, in this city, this country club, I am known as James Garrison. Before I came here I had another name, and when I leave, I will take another still.

He hesitated. "Hendricks sent me."

Ah, I thought, another customer. And this time via a recommendation. Again I nodded.

He wanted to be absolutely sure that he was talking to the right person. "Did you do a little job for Hendricks about two months ago? In August?"

I am a cautious man. "Perhaps."

He decided that would have to do. "I've never met anybody like you before. Just how far can I trust you?"

"I have never failed a client . . . or gotten him into trouble."

He sat down. "Hendricks told me about you. He said I would find you here."

I HAVE BEEN A MEMBER OF THIS COUNTRY CLUB FOR ABOUT a year now. It is quite an exclusive organization. However with the aid of expertly forged credentials, I have been accepted as a member.

I spend a great many hours here. At this table. I find that the bar-rooms of country clubs are my best hunting grounds. People drink. Sometimes too much. They talk. They tell me things.

I listen sympathetically and when I find someone who is a potential customer, I cultivate him carefully.

I now studied the man before me. Typical, I thought. Middle-aged, gray-haired, a bit portly. A Kiwanis button in his left lapel. One does not see many Kiwanis buttons in a club of this kind.

He stared at his fingers for a few seconds. "It's my wife," he said. "We've been married about thirty years. I'd like to get a divorce, but the court would probably give her just about everything we own because she knows about" He stopped.

I smiled. "There's another woman?"

He shrugged. "Well, I'd like to get married again. Let's put it that way."

Yes, I thought, at that age they begin looking around. He's found someone else and probably she's twenty years younger than his wife.

He continued. "I'll be at a banquet Thursday evening. From seven-thirty to about eleven. A lot of people will be there who know me. It's stag, so my wife won't be with me. She'll be at home. That's when I want it done."

Yes, they all needed alibis.

He sighed. "A lot of times, I wanted to do it myself. But this is the better way. Hiring you to do it for me."

I agreed. Yes, much better. And profitable for me.

"Make it look like a break-in," he said. "She keeps some jewelry in the top drawer of her dresser in the bedroom."

"What method would you prefer?" I asked.

"Method?"

"Shall I shoot her? Stab her? Use a club?"

He thought about that. "Whatever you do best."

"There is the question of my fee," I said. "I am paid *before* I perform my services. Not after. And in cash, of course."

I had expected him to tell me that he would bring the money tomorrow, but he reached into his suitcoat pocket and brought out a

package. I

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package. He put it on the table.

Then he handed me a slip of paper with an address on it. "I suppose I might as well give you my name?"

I smiled. "Of course. After all, you have just provided me with your address and I can learn the identity of your wife simply by reading the newspapers the next day."

He stood up. "The name is Walter Morgan. Lieutenant Walter Morgan."

I blinked. Lieutenant? "Navy man?" I asked hopefully. "Retired?"

Now he grinned. "No. Police department. And not retired."

I CLOSED MY EYES AND THEN QUICKLY REOPENED THEM. What actual *proof* did he have that I had ever killed anybody? My own words? Just what *had* I told him? I couldn't remember exactly.

Did he have some kind of a recording device on his person? And the microphone was in that damn Kiwanis button? Or had he gotten to my table when I was not here and bugged the entire area?

I tried to laugh. "See here, this is just a little private joke between Hendricks and me. A little practical joke we've put together to see how the club members react."

"I'm not a club member. And Hendricks wasn't joking."

"Then Hendricks is a liar," I said. "He can't prove a thing."

Lieutenant Morgan shook his head. "No, Hendricks wasn't lying. Or playing a joke. Not at a time like that."

I was confused. "Time like that? Time like what?"

"It was an automobile accident," Morgan said. "Yesterday evening. He was rushed to the hospital, but it was obvious even to him that he was dying and didn't have long. He decided to go to his maker with a clear conscience, so he sent for me. He remembered me because I was in charge of the investigation into the murder of his wife. Just before he died, he whispered the whole story in my ear."

Morgan shoved the package closer to me.

The package? Thank goodness I hadn't touched it. No one would find my fingerprints on that bit of evidence.

Morgan's grin widened. "Take it. Five thousand dollars. That's all I could raise. Policemen sometimes want to get rid of their wives too, you know."

He turned and walked away.

My fee is usually at least thirty thousand, but in his case I made an exception.

Lieutenant Morgan didn't know it, but he'd talked *himself* into being the victim!